

# LESSON 192

## GOD'S HOUSE: HIS CHURCH

Related Scripture: Matthew 18:10-20

**KEY VERSE:** "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste."—Isaiah 28:16.

Lesson Scripture: Ephesians 2:14-22;  
Matthew 16:13-20

### Introduction:

Lessons for the quarter beginning this week are supposed to deal, more or less, with the church. Hardly any subject from the Bible is more confused and misunderstood in the popular thinking of a Christianity far removed from Christ. If we are ever to understand the New Testament teaching on the church, we must get rid of some popular fancies.

In the New Testament sense, a "church" is simply an assembly or congregation, and true churches of our Lord are organized congregations of baptized believers in Christ, having Christ alone as their Foundation and Head. If we can keep this fact clear in our minds, we can avoid such superstitious ideas as that a denomination is a church, or that there really exists a "universal" or "invisible" church as imagined by heretics.

This week's lesson can be outlined as follows:

1. House of Peace, Eph. 2:14-18
  - a. Peace in Christ, 14, 15
  - b. Peace through the cross, 16
  - c. Peace by conciliation, 17, 18
2. House of Prophecy, Eph. 2:19-22
  - a. Building inherited, 19
  - b. Building incorporated, 20
  - c. Building increasing, 21
  - d. Building inhabited, 22
3. House of Profession, Mat. 16:13-15
  - a. Pertinent question, 13
  - b. Perplexing question, 14
  - c. Personal question, 15
4. House of Promise, Mat. 16:16-18
  - a. Savior recognized, 16
  - b. Savior's revelation, 17
  - c. Savior's reassurance, 18
5. House of Performance, Mat. 16:19, 20
  - a. Authority specified, 19
  - b. Authority specialized, 20

### Notes on the Printed Text:

#### House of Peace, Ephesians 2:14-18.

Addressing Gentile believers in the church at Ephesus, Paul emphasized the peace with God through Christ enjoyed by Jew and Gentile alike. This peace with God brings also peace with one another. Ideally, we should not need different churches for different races; Jews and Gentiles of every race and of all social and economic levels find salvation in the same Christ and so should be able to enjoy spiritual fellowship in the same spiritual body.

#### Peace in Christ, 14, 15.

"He" refers to Christ. By taking upon His own flesh the punishment of the righteous wrath of God that was due us, Christ abolished the enmity and broke down the middle wall of partition that separated us from God and from one another.

Doing so for Jew and Gentile alike, He "made both one," making "in himself of twain one new man." For the sake of confused thinkers, let me point out that this is not a universal or invisible "new man" incorporating all believers in some mysterious fashion. Rather it is a simple abstraction which means in real life that any Jew and any Gentile who believes in Christ receives the same salvation from God, and on the same terms.

#### Peace Through the Cross, 16.

"One body" here refers to the literal

human body of Jesus that was nailed to the cross, essentially the same as "his flesh" in v. 15, where He is said to have abolished the enmity which here He is said to have slain. This enmity is explained in v. 15 as being "the law of commandments in ordinances." The penalty of law already suffered by Christ upon the cross cannot be enforced again upon His people.

#### Peace by Conciliation, 17, 18.

Gospel preaching is a message of peace paid for by the precious blood of Christ and applied through faith. Gentiles afar off and Jews that were near "both have access, by one Spirit unto the Father" through faith in Him.

#### House of Prophecy, Ephesians 2:19-22.

Old Testament prophets had told of a time when God would call Gentiles to be His people, and when He would dwell among His people built together as a spiritual temple. The "mystery of Christ . . . in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Eph. 3:4, 5), but this certainly does not mean that it was not made known at all.

"Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7.)

#### Building Inherited, 19.

Adoption into the household of God makes us heirs of God through Christ. (Gal. 4:5-7.) The spiritual inheritance belongs as truly to Gentile as to Jewish believers in Christ.

#### Building Incorporated, 20.

Members of a genuine New Testament church are built together as "living stones" (1 Pe. 2:5) into a spiritual building. The principal Foundation of this building can be only Christ Himself (1 Cor. 3:11), but in a secondary sense the apostles and prophets served as a foundation of the first church, and so of all later churches of the same kind.

#### Building Increasing, 21.

Only when all the members of a church are "fitly framed together" will "all the building" (the whole church) grow as it ought "unto an holy temple in the Lord."

#### **Building Inhabited, 22.**

Members of the church at Ephesus, enjoying fellowship and growth in the Lord, were reminded that a house is built to be lived in. So they were "built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

#### **House of Profession, Matthew 16:13-15.**

Following the New Testament order, Baptists have insisted through the centuries that in order to qualify for church membership a man must profess faith in Jesus Christ. Church membership never saved anyone; on the contrary, only those who have been already saved and baptized can become true members of true churches.

#### **Pertinent Question, 13.**

Who is Jesus? No intelligent person can deny or ignore His personality, His work, or His claims. At the time He asked this question, He had demonstrated His power to friends and foes. Nearly 2,000 years later, His power is still more notable. Who is He?

#### **Perplexing Question, 14.**

Then as now different men gave different answers, all acknowledging His greatness but most of them failing to perceive the truth.

#### **Personal Question, 15.**

What men think of Christ cannot change the facts about Him, but what they think about Him will affect their own lives here and hereafter. This question therefore is a most important personal question: Who do you say that Jesus is?

#### **House of Promise, Matthew 16:16-18.**

Jesus instituted His church to proclaim the right answers to the world. Amid the general confusion of the world and of false churches, the kind of church that Jesus called His was to maintain a faithful testimony for Him until He comes again.

#### **Savior Recognized, 16.**

"Christ" means "Messiah" or "Anointed," referring to His three-fold office of Prophet, Priest, and King. He is the Son, not only of the Virgin, but also "of the living God."

#### **Savior's Revelation, 17.**

Jesus revealed that God had revealed the truth to Peter. True faith is not a product of flesh and blood, but comes to us as the free gift of God. "Barjona" (son of Jona) was therefore greatly blessed.

#### **Savior's Reassurance, 18.**

"Thou art Rocklet, and upon this Rock I will build my church." The pun in the Greek is difficult to translate into English. "Thou art Petros, and upon this Petra I will build my church." The word "petros" means a piece of rock, or a stone; the word "petra" means a mass of rock, bedrock. Jesus had made Simon a building stone in the church that He was building and would continue to build on Himself.

Whatever is signified here by "the gates of hades," Jesus assures us here that they cannot prevail against His church. Founders and followers of false churches have the gall to accuse Christ and His church of failure, but His word will stand when these usurpers have been forgotten.

#### **House of Performance, Matthew 16:19, 20.**

Christ built and commissioned His church to perform His work. Any so-called church that does nothing, or that busies itself in matters other than those committed by our Lord to His church (Mat. 28:18-20), is certainly not performing as a true house of God ought to perform.

#### **Authority Specified, 19.**

Let us hear no false pretensions as to any legislative authority supposed to have been given either to Peter or to the church. The "keys of the kingdom of heaven" are administrative only, to be used by divine direction, not by human whim. Whatever authority was given here to Peter was given to the whole church in Mat. 18:18: Translating correctly, we find that the only authority we have on earth is to obey orders from heaven:

"Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall have been (already) bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall have been (already) loosed in heaven." (Mat. 18:18.)

Of course, any special authority given to Peter personally is irrelevant to us, since Peter is not here to use it. Some Baptists, however, have the Romish idea that a church has authority to do as it pleases, and that heaven will be bound by our decisions. This is a false notion. Our only authority is to carry out orders already decided in heaven. These orders will always be in accord with God's written word, and any other action, by a Baptist church or anyone else, is sinful rebellion against God.

#### **Authority Specialized, 20.**

Christ Himself, and since His return to heaven the Holy Spirit, may give special orders in special circumstances. The age-long mission of the church is to tell everyone that Jesus is the Christ; but for a short time and for special reasons the disciples were commanded not to tell it. So we need not only the general instructions of the word but also the special leading of the Spirit to know how, when, and where to apply the truth.

#### **Key Verse:**

"Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste."—Isaiah 28:16.

This is one of many prophecies to the same general effect. Christ is the only safe foundation for the individual life and for the organized church. We have no need for haste or confusion if we are settled on Him.